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ABSTRACT

Promotion, outreach, and data production efforts related to the 1990 decennial census conducted by the U.S. Department of Commerce are discussed. Promotional efforts, which particularly targeted minority groups, included multilingual mass media advertisements, public service announcements, press releases, school and church components, and telephone campaigns. The Statistical Standards and Methodology Section of the Census Bureau arranged most of the studies of the effectiveness of the census promotion efforts and a quick examination of the mail return rates from the census indicate that these efforts appear to be successful. A study by a company called Vitt Media (chosen by the Advertising Council) came to the same conclusion. A review of the Redistricting Data Program, designed to produce timely data products, indicated that an early and aggressive outreach to legislative leaders and other stakeholders was also successful. In sum, preliminary findings indicate that the innovative, state-of-the-art techniques used by the census promoters were effective. (TJH)

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TESTIMONY BY SUSANNE H. HOWARD
ASSOCIATE UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON CENSUS AND POPULATION

AUGUST 8, 1990

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Though I have worked closely with the Under Secretary on many aspects of the census, I would like to concentrate on these today - on the promotion, outreach and data production effort.

You have heard many references to quality in the preceding testimony. You will find that same dedication and commitment to quality in the promotion program of 1990 census.

In conjunction with the Department of Commerce, the Census Bureau developed and implemented an unprecedented campaign to promote the 1990 census. One of the key goals in that campaign was to encourage minorities to be counted in the census. From my perspective, that campaign was very successful.

Briefly, I would like to mention some key elements. There was a major mass media effort with specialized advertisements aimed at the general audience as well as the Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian audiences. This multifaceted ad campaign was new for 1990.

The PSA advertisements were supplemented by personal testimonials from sports figures, Miss America, key political leaders, entertainers, and, of course, the President. These media efforts were further supplemented with a major grass roots effort. The Census Bureau hired a staff of about 300 specialists to work within communities to promote the census. The early start and extra training for this program was new for 1990.

The news reporting of the census was another way to get out the census message. The Census Bureau produced news releases, a Communicators kit, B-Roll footage, etc. to make news reporting on the census as easy as possible. These things were not done in 1980. Also new for 1990 was the staffing of a media unit in each of our Regional offices.

Our promotion efforts were all multi-lingual, including actual assistance in many languages other than English. We also received significant support in promoting the census from others - local governments, key minority groups, local minority newspapers, the two major Spanish TV networks, and many parts of the private sector. I can not list all of these, but let me describe one example that is representative. Southland Corporation arranged for the Census Bureau to have space in selected 7-11 stores for census assistance centers. They gave up shelf-space to help the census! That one example is illustrative of the extent to which people were

willing to help. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those organizations that helped in any way - big or small.

There were many other parts of the promotion campaign. We had a major project with schools; religious leaders gave census messages; and Head Start did a telephone campaign to remind people about the census.

Taken together, even in a brief summary, you can see that we made a major effort to promote the census. Did it work? I think yes.

We have many programs in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the 1990 promotion campaign. Most of these are arranged through the Statistical Standards and Methodology Section of the Census Bureau. I am sure the results of those studies will be discussed at upcoming meetings of the American Statistical Association.

A quick examination of the mail return rates from the census also show that the promotion effort was successful. Many minority areas, particularly Hispanic areas, had higher than average mail return rates. Many of these areas were well below the national average in 1980.

To get additional information on the effectiveness of the promotion campaign, we have contracted for an evaluation through the

Advertising Council. The Advertising Council picked a company called Vitt Media. Their study included a telephone survey and a monitoring of census exposure through the media in six selected media markets. The Vitt Media report is not yet final, but I would like to share one preliminary finding with you.

The study found that the census Public Service Announcements (PSA's) were aired at a very high level in the six markets - a level 50 per cent higher than the typical monthly average for all Coca Cola brands and about 25 per cent higher than for the census PSA's in March 1980.

In 1983, when the Census Bureau began an extensive program of planning and testing for the 1990 census, it set the production of timely data products as a goal for a quality census. We are confident that we will achieve that objective and I would like to cite two examples from our Redistricting Data Program that support our belief.

First, because of early and aggressive outreach to legislative leaders in all states and to other stakeholders in the redistricting process, the Census Bureau was able to begin the Redistricting Data Program 2 years ahead of the April 1, 1987 deadline set by Congress. As a direct result, states had more time to consider and prepare for participation and 45 states, compared

to only 23 in 1980, will receive election precinct data to aid their efforts in drawing districts for Congress and state legislative chambers.

Second, this early start will also benefit states in another major way. In the last census, state legislatures had to laboriously overlay their precinct lines on census maps during the crunch of their 1981 sessions when they were rushing to draw, consider and pass districting plans before adjournment. The accelerated 1990 Redistricting Data Program has allowed the Bureau to insert the states' precinct lines into our computer-readable map base called TIGER during the summer. By the end of this month, we will start to provide state officials and other requestors with TIGER/Line computer files that can be used to create maps of precincts and census blocks months before the 1991 legislative sessions begin.

While the Census Bureau will produce many other data products, the timely provision of data and maps critical to representative democracy will be a yardstick for measuring the quality of the 1990 census.

It is too early to rate all aspects of these census programs. But, from my personal observation, from the preliminary findings, and from the participation of states and local cities I think it is safe to conclude that the 1990 census has utilized innovative,

state-of-the-art techniques to make this the best and most accurate census ever.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts on this important issue.

END

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